

ANDREI NEKRASOV

Visiting Captain Fibbur



Captain Fibbur and I became friends when I was a midshipman. We went to sea together many times. I later helped the captain write his memoirs of his wonderful cruise around the world on a sailboat. Many years have passed since then, but we have remained friends through thick and thin. Whenever I visit him, Captain Fibbur likes to talk of times past, and he always says in parting: "Ah, yes, young man. I've been through a lot and I've seen a lot in my day, and there's so much I could tell the world!"

I recently went to visit the old captain again. When he opened the door he said in a mysterious voice, "I have a surprise for you today, my friend."

"What is it?"

"Wait and see." He placed an envelope of slides on the table. The envelope was yellow with age. "I took these during that famous trip. Remember the *Umph*? I put these slides away and then forgot all about them till I came upon them this morning."

We turned off the light and spent the evening looking at slides.



“That’s me,” captain Fibbur said as he turned on the projector. “I was in my prime then. Not more than fifty. Just a boy, really. Ah, how time flies.



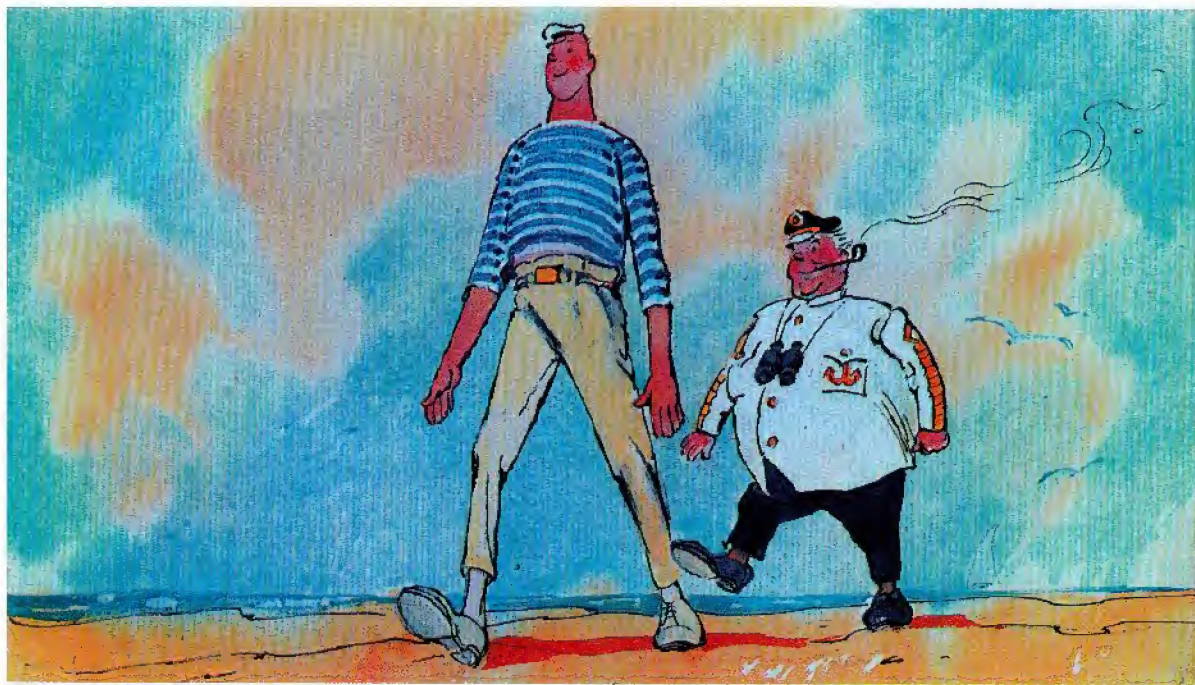
“That’s our faithful *Umph*. I can’t remember who took the picture or where it was taken, but it came out fine. There’s Lum, my first mate. He’s the one on the left in the striped jersey. And Bux, an able-bodied seaman. You can see him resting on a crate. You can even see his beard and hat. That’s me at the helm.



“You’ll like this one. Don’t you know who that is? It’s you! That was the first time you came to see me. It’s a candid shot. You didn’t even know I was taking the picture. You might say I knew we’d become friends.



“Here’s another first meeting. That’s the first time I saw my ship. It was really a tub when I took over, but I turned her into a beauty. Too bad the carpenters used some fresh planks, but I’ll tell you about that later.



“That’s Lum, my first mate again. A very fine fellow. He’s seven feet tall and as strong as an ox, and he’s got a voice like a foghorn. They don’t come any better. But you know him.



“Remember I said the carpenters used fresh planks? Well, while the ship was in dry-dock, the new wood sprang roots. They had to use a tug to get us loose. That’s when we lost the first three letters of the name, so the *Triumph* became the ... *Umph*. Still and all, I made the *Umph* a famous sailing ship, as you know.



“This is Lum and me in Norway. We sailed up a fjord, left the ship and made a campfire on the beach. That’s when the forest nearby caught fire. Soon the fire was closing in on us. We wanted to run, but where could we go? The only place was up, up to the top of the mountain. When we got there we saw it was crowded with squirrels. They were all trying to escape from the fire.



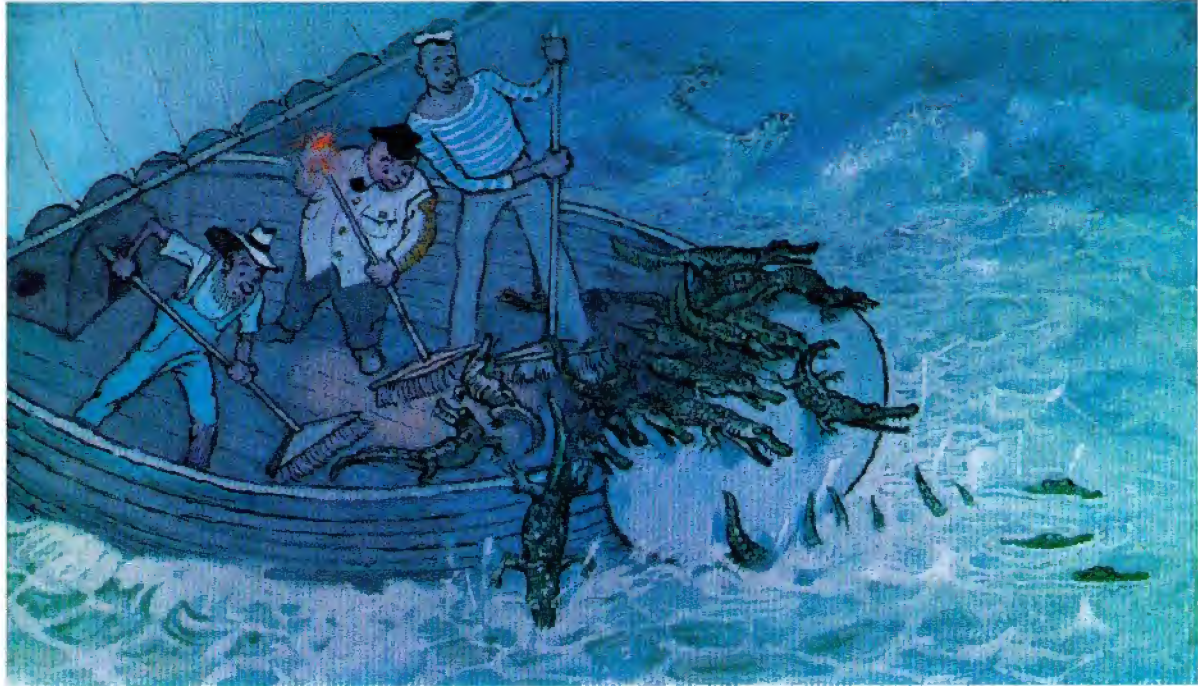
“I looked down. There was our ship. You can see it between the cliffs. The squirrels spotted it, too, and they dived down in droves, right onto the deck. Then I decided to jump. ‘Down after the squirrels, Mate, full steam ahead!’ I shouted.



“Lum took a step towards the edge and then turned and said: ‘I’d rather burn than jump.’ I had to hand him my binoculars, to make the ship seem closer. He jumped and I followed. I’ve been around in my life and didn’t need any help.



“That is how our voyage began. We sailed around Europe to Africa. After we took on supplies of ostrich eggs, elephant trunks, dates and breadfruit we sailed across the Red Sea. A terrible storm blew up, and the heat was awful. Poor Bux got seasick.



“I could hear him moaning: ‘A crocodile ... and another one ... and another crocodile.’ I decided he was coming down with some strange tropical fever, but when I struck a match I saw the deck was crawling with crocodiles. They’d slipped us a load of crocodile eggs instead of ostrich eggs, and they’d all hatched in the heat.



“This is the three of us in the Antarctic. We passed right by a sick whale. The poor thing had a bad head cold and could hardly breathe. I ground up some aspirin, put it on a shovel and tossed it into its nostril. I thought I was helping it, but it only made the whale sneeze.



“That sneeze sent us sailing through the clouds. I thought it was surely the end, but we landed safely. Now Bux and I were alone in the middle of the ocean, since we had lost sight of the ship and Lum. There were only two boards to keep us afloat.



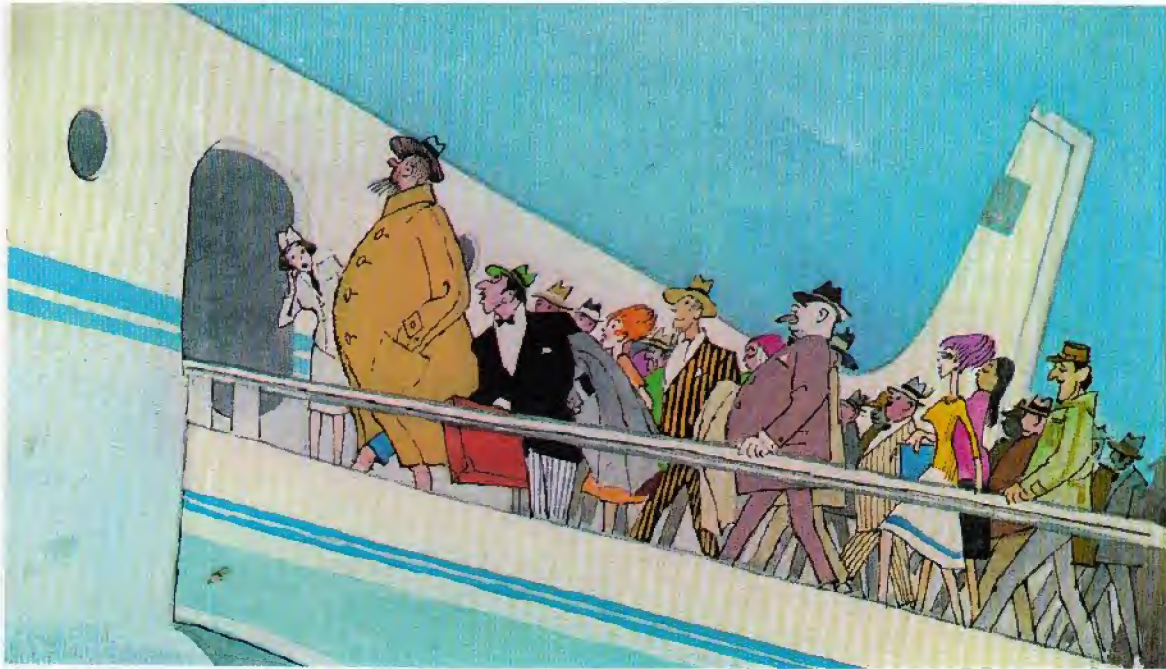
“When we awoke the next day we sighted land. It was Hawaii. The surf there is wonderful. Everybody goes surfing in Hawaii, so Bux and I stood up on our boards and sailed right onto the beach.



“We found a newspaper. It had an article about the *Umph* being shipwrecked near Brazil. We immediately decided to fly there. I had some money in my cap, but only enough for two plane tickets. However, we needed some clothes. We saw a cheap raincoat in a shop, but it was too big.



“Bux had a good idea. He said, ‘Let’s take it anyway. Then we can both fly on one ticket. Bend over.’ He stood up on my shoulders and put on the raincoat.



“Imagine, we got away with it. The stewardess thought we looked funny, but didn’t stop us. We got to our seat and were soon off. Though Bux was having a nice time, looking out of the window, I wasn’t enjoying the trip very much.



“After a while I got out my pipe and lit it. Suddenly I heard someone scream: ‘Help! Fire!’ I realised what was wrong, but it was too late. Just then the pilot pulled a lever and the cockpit broke away from the rest of the plane. We were coming down on a parachute, right over the Amazon.



“Did you ever go swimming in the Amazon? Well, don’t. You haven’t missed anything. There are clouds of mosquitoes there and all sorts of horrible creatures in the water. Things are still worse on the bank. It was hard going, getting out of there. Still, we were determined to find Lum and we did. Imagine! It was a grand reunion.



“By then he’d had the *Umph* made seaworthy again and had sort of settled down. He tried talking us into staying, too, but we raised our sail and headed for home. And that’s how that voyage ended. Do drop in again. I’m always glad to see you. We’ll have another cup of tea and talk about old times together.”

Translated by FAINNA GLAGOLEVA

Drawings by V. BORDILOVSKY

А. НЕКРАСОВ

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